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THE LOUEDU OF THE TRANSVAAL

By J. D. *and* E. J. KRIGE

The World View of the Lovedu

101 THE Lovedu are a South Bantu tribe ruled by a divine queen. They live amid fertile foothills and forest-clad ravines below the Drakensberg escarpment in the north-eastern Transvaal. Their country, of which the present Mujaji Reserve is but a small portion, is situated near the frontiers of the main masses of Sotho-Tswana, Venda, Tsonga, and Nguni peoples; and it was important for the development of Lovedu institutions that the great migratory movements of these major groups skirted round this geographically insulated area.

144 177 563 642 Before the coming of the Lovedu the population of this area appears to have been predominantly Sotho not unmixed with Karanga, Tsonga, and Nguni elements. Then, about three centuries ago, a small group of Karanga immigrants from the crumbling empire of Monomatapa in Southern Rhodesia arrived and gradually incorporated the local population. From this group the royal house of the Lovedu traces its descent, and it was these people who introduced the complex of royal institutions which eventually became crucial for the world view of the Lovedu tribe. For two centuries, the formative period of their development, they enjoyed peace during which they came to dominate the area and to establish firmly the conception of the divine kingship which they had brought from the north. The situation was complicated at first by the numerical weakness of the nuclear group and the diversity of the incorporated alien groups; and a major challenge was later presented by the influx in the first half of the nineteenth century of great numbers of refugees fleeing from the depredations of Shaka, Moselekatse, and others, and seeking sanctuary in the inviolable realm of Mujaji, the rain queen of the Lovedu. They responded to this challenge by an adaptation of the pattern of the sacred kingship that facilitated incorporation of alien elements, and the result has been a remarkably coherent and well-integrated way of life.

Some Aspects of Lovedu Social Structure

231 241 Despite some unique emphases, Lovedu culture is not atypical of the South Bantu. They practise a mixed economy of hoe-culture and cattle-rearing with, however, less reliance upon cattle than Nguni or Tswana. They cultivate a fair variety of crops, most important of which are maize, millet, pumpkins, and groundnuts, and their exploitation of the rich, natural sub-tropical vegetation for purposes of nutrition, economic pursuits, and medico-magical practices is exceedingly thorough. The few cattle 231 that are reared are significant, not for subsistence or as wealth, but for

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231 creating and maintaining the all-important social relationships and realignments in the social structure that arise from marriage. Cattle are not 'gods with the wet nose' as among Tswana, but they may be dedicated to the ancestor spirits.

433 The economy is largely a subsistence one. A man should have enough
556 for his family's needs as well as to entertain friends and neighbours with beer to maintain his good name and reputation for liberality, and to fulfil his kinship obligations. But accumulation of goods is frowned upon: in any case, in the absence of markets or methods of preservation of the crops, an
430 economic incentive is lacking. Payment for most services, even that of a
431 doctor, is made in beer. Exchanges on the whole are usually not motivated
47 by differential needs but by goodwill, the obligations of kinship, and the general emphasis upon long-run reciprocity; they are for the most part not business transactions but gift exchanges. Kin and neighbours co-operate in work parties for weeding, reroofing, building. Helpers are honoured as workers (*vashumi*) and treated to beer at the end of the day, yet they cannot be said to receive any specific reward, for the gate-crashers (*vakokedi* or beggars), who join the party when it repairs to the home of the host for beer, drink calabash for calabash with the workers. In ploughing partnerships, in which each of the parties contributes his services or some commodity, there is complete disregard of equivalence between what is contributed by a partner and the service he is entitled to. Reciprocity operates through the instrumentality of economic goods, but it owes its significance as a moral force to the interdependences that arise from the social and political structure.

612 The society is patrilineal and marriage patrilocal, but cognates, agnates, and affines are not segregated into distinctive groups; each category overlaps to such an extent with the others, through cross-cousin marriage and other factors, that both structurally and functionally it is the bilateral kin-groups that are significant.

582 One of the basic features of the social system is the linking of brother and
583 sister whereby the cattle (*munywalo*) coming in from the marriage of a sister are allocated to her brother to enable him to marry a wife. This cattle-link-
604 ing of brother and sister is co-ordinated with cross-cousin marriage and an alignment of lineages into wife-providers and wife-receivers. That a man is expected to marry where his father has married or, more accurately, where his mother's marriage cattle have been used to establish a 'home', is the inevitable consequence, according to Lovedu conceptions, of the right of a sister to her cattle-linked brother's daughter as a daughter-in-law, who will cook and stamp for her and care for her in her old age. The arrangement implies that this girl should marry the son of the cattle-linked sister
[568] of her father, but should there be no such son her paternal aunt may nevertheless 'marry' her, in which case she will bear children by some person appointed by the aunt to act for her non-existent son or 'pick them up' as she wishes.

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A sister's cattle-providing capacity gives her a pivotal position in the social structure. It is the cattle accruing from her marriage that 'build' a house for her brother and 'beget' children to her lineage. Over this house she has rights that can be legally and mystically enforced. She settles disputes in it, and distributes its possessions when its owner dies. She invokes the gods on its behalf; no one, not even her brother himself (the husband and head of the house), can ill treat the wife of this house without having to reckon with her, and any breach of the marriage relationship is void without her consent. It will be evident that no judgement of the Lovedu courts in regard to a marriage has much chance of being carried out without the assistance and co-operation of this sister. For this and other reasons women are prominent as intermediaries and conciliators in the society. It should also be no surprise that any woman may marry wives, whose children call her 'father'; that many women are kraal heads and some of them the most important districts heads in the country. As chief officiators in offerings and sacrifice women play an important role also in religion.

Structurally the agnatic group, of which the cattle-linked brother is a member, is a minor lineage three to four generations deep, which supplies wives to the lineage into which his sister has married. The obligations of providing wives on the one hand and returning cattle on the other cannot, indeed, be enforced beyond the actual houses concerned and their lineal descendants, but the relationships of reciprocity and the behaviour patterns of helpfulness on the part of the wife-receivers, and of honouring and periodically bringing beer on the part of the wife-providers, are usually extended beyond these houses to the whole minor lineage and, where the relationships have been long established and are kept alive as part of the political structure, they may embrace major lineages five to eight generations deep. The wife-providers are called either maternal uncles (*nomalume*), since a man's mother's brother (*malume*) is ideally his wife's father, or grandparents (*nomakhulu*), since his maternal grandfather is the male representative of his wife's agnatic group (being her paternal grandfather). Conversely, the wife-receivers are called either sons-in-law (*notsemi*), because the lineage into which a man's sister marries is also the lineage into which his daughter marries, or *nafukulu* (grandchildren or sister's sons), a man's sister's son being the same person as his daughter's husband or his father's granddaughter. It should be noted that, even though these wife-providing and wife-receiving lineages are related through marriage, the relationships between them are not merely affinal. The wife-providers and wife-receivers are not merely brothers-in-law but also cognates—wife-providers being maternal uncles and grandparents, and wife-receivers being children of paternal aunts, sisters, or daughters. A man's maternal kin are also his affines, while the maternal kin and sororal affines are merged with the paternal kin.

This merging of various types of kin is perhaps the reason why all four lines of kin—father's father, father's mother, mother's father, mother's

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753 769 mother—are important in ancestor worship. Any of these forebears may seize a man and make him ill, require a dedicated animal or a shrine in his or her honour, and, in fact, one may find shrines in one village or kraal to kin of several different lineages. In practice the mother's mother is an ancestor who most often causes illness in her grandchildren because of her great love for them.

621 The core of a large kraal or village (20 to 80 huts) is usually the minor lineage, but there are always also affines and cognates, quite apart from the spouses of agnatic members of the lineage who themselves are usually cognates. In kraal matters it is by virtue of being not an agnate, but a member of the kindred (*mudzi*), that a man has a voice. The core of the district is 602 634 643 sometimes also the lineage of the district head, but the lineage is not a political group and the influence and authority of its head are not a function of his relationship, agnatic or other, to the people living in the district. Districts, of which there are 140—with an average area of 1 square mile and population of 250—are linked to the queen on the pattern of cattle and wife exchanges. Districts are either held by descendants of one of the original agnatic lineages of the nuclear ruling group, or they have been allocated to *vafumi* (wives of the queen) or to immigrant alien groups. They all send wives to the queen, who thereby becomes their son-in-law (*mufumalu*) and, by allocating them to other district heads and to royal relatives, she becomes parent-in-law (*vamakhadzi*) to the latter. Those lineages of the royal nuclear group who send wives to the queen are both 'brothers' (agnates) and relatives-in-law (affines) to her. The use of the mechanism of the social system to align groups into reciprocal relations forges a great network of ties radiating from the queen to all strategic points in the society. It was in this way that large numbers of alien refugees were incorporated into the tribe and became related to one another. Payments of tribute and services to the queen are thus looked upon as the fulfilment of kinship obligations, in return for which the queen not only gives land and protection from enemies, but also transforms the clouds into rain and so frees men from fear and uncertainty.

602 641 643 Thus the kinship ties that bind subjects to the rain queen are interlocked with the values and institutions supporting her divinity. The homage in wives that is paid to her for giving men the blessings of rain, is also the means of forging the network of kinship ties. The kinship ties, again, convert political tribute and services due to the queen into morally sanctioned ceremonial exchanges between relatives-in-law; and just as there is no need for military virtues and military organization to deter enemies, since the queen, merely by withholding rain, can secure the defeat of the foe, so also there is no need to rely upon force to secure the willing allegiance of subjects who are treated to the beer that they bring, ostensibly as tribute to a sovereign but in reality as gifts from parents-in-law.

643 772 182 The queen is accordingly the pivot of the nodal institutions of the society. The benevolent forces in the universe are, as the Lovedu sometimes

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ary, equally divided between the ancestors and the rain queen. And it is she also who controls, in the interest of social well-being, that half of the cosmic order upon which men's life and happiness are conceived most vitally to depend. This dependence upon her and the moral imperatives of the kinship obligations between her and her subjects are the main factors conditioning the Lovedu outlook upon the world and upon society. Their ritual ideology, linking the queen's mystical powers to the welfare of society, expresses their most important conceptions of the ordering of the natural world; their kinship ideology, incorporated into the political system and converting political into moral obligations, provides the main principles governing men's relations to one another. Agreement and mutual adjustment between individuals become ultimate values which have an overriding validity in determining the rights and duties of man to man. The Lovedu political pattern follows that of the centralized states of the South Bantu; yet it is not force but reciprocity, not administrative machinery but ties of sentiment, not inflexible rules but agreement, that are the great principles of social and political obligation.

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Myths and Origins

The Lovedu are not given to speculation about first beginnings or final causes. There is no world-dawn or far-off mythical event when the order of nature and of society was irrevocably instituted. There is not even a sky-god to account for lightning and thunder or to furnish men with an explanation of stellar phenomena, such as the movement of heavenly bodies. Some of the larger stars are named, for example the Pleiades which are associated with hoeing time, but the association seems to be a vestige diffused from another culture and has no real significance, whether pragmatic or mystical. A vague, hardly ever invoked myth attributes the creation of the world and man to *Khuzwane* who left his footprints on certain rocks in the north when they were still new and soft. But the act of creation, like *Khuzwane* himself, is too remote, too unrelated to present realities, to be of any concern to men; and they find no place in, nor do they in any way influence, the Lovedu philosophy of the cosmos or of society. The Lovedu apparently feel the need to posit a first or final cause, but such a cause has not continued to operate as a force. An inexplicable affliction such as sterility appears sometimes to be attributed to *Mudimo*, the creator-god of the Sotho, who, according to Lovedu thought, is identical with *Khuzwane*; but *Mudimo* in this context is to be equated with a conditional destiny, and thus does not imply belief in fatalism since the course of events can be deflected by man-made medicines. Nor is there any supplication of the creator, for the Lovedu do not conceive of any link between their ancestor spirits and the creator: *Khuzwane* cannot be approached through the ancestors.

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Thus origins of the cosmic order and wonders of celestial phenomena do not exercise the Lovedu mind. When Simeon, a close relative of the queen, whom we had interested in these things, asked the old men about them,

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772 they deprecated his lack of practical sense and wondered whether he was
821 losing his reason. What is significant to the Lovedu is not the origin but the maintenance of the order of nature. Interest in the continuity of natural forces centres, however, not on an abstract system, but on the benefit of man or rather of the Lovedu people. Among these forces the most important are those governing the auspicious movements of clouds and their transformation into rain. But they stand in no relation to the forces that brought the world into existence. Among Lovedu, in contrast for example to Ovambian peoples, there is consequently complete discontinuity between mythological origins, or the forces that operated at the dawn of the world, and present realities or the forces maintaining the existing order. Even the ancestor gods do not bridge this gap, and man's dependence upon them—and hence the force of religious sanctions—derives not from their relationship to the beginnings of things but from kinship principles.

773 Myths play an insignificant part in Lovedu life. Almost the only myths are legends of the institution of the present political order which give a generalized account of the migration of the royal nuclear group from Rhodesia and of the reigns of the various chiefs. There is no attempt in them to intensify the beliefs or validate the institutional arrangements underlying the sacred kingship. It is not these myths that give warranty to the queen's mystical credentials and to the complex of customs that supports them. Indeed today scant credence is accorded by the younger men to the legendary royal ancestry which traces the descent of the nuclear group to the Karanga of Monomotapa in Southern Rhodesia, for the Lovedu find it difficult to believe that they are related to a people who now appear to them to be inferior, lacking the prestige and aristocratic pretensions of their reputed ancestors. In one version of the myth the Lovedu broke away from Monomotapa under the younger 'chosen' son to whom the previous chief had given the rain-charms. He fled south as a result of his conflict with the eldest brother who had legal precedence. In another, it is a daughter who, having committed incest with her brother, escapes with the rain-charms and her infant son from her outraged father.

[78 The legends are further concerned to explain the settlement of the
242 Lovedu in their present environment: their choice was determined by the absence of red earth which would soil their loincloths and the abundance of *mavula* trees and mounds of edible termites, both of which are valued and ritually significant items in their diet. A later dissension between two claimants to the throne is presented as a conflict between chief son and chosen son, and again the victory of the chosen son vindicates the divine right of the rain-maker against legal precedence, and in that way appears to justify the present flexible system of succession as against the challenge of the Northern Sotho emphasis on primogeniture and certainty. Just as the title to becoming ruler of a new tribe is in one version validated by the incest of brother and sister, so the later and equally momentous change from kings to queens is brought into relation with father-daughter incest.

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But the whole cycle of myths merely emphasises in very general terms the importance of rain-making as a prerequisite of the claim to chieftainship and for the well-being of the tribe; it does not concern itself with justifying the validity of the various institutional arrangements that are the main support of the beliefs and values of the queen's mystical credentials.

Conception of the Natural Order

The Lovedu do not oppose man and nature. There are no explicit formulations of the nature of the universe, but a natural order inexorably going its ordained way is implicitly rejected in their conceptions. The assumption is that cosmic forces are controllable and, in fact, controlled at every turn by man for his own benefit. Since nature is of interest and importance only so far as it is or can be used by society, there is no such conception as a world order unrelated to man's activities and desires. The order of nature is a controlled one. There are various ways in which man is able to use and control powers in nature—by *vupuga* (the evil aspect of which is *vulvi*), i.e. by the use of power concentrated in certain persons and objects; by appeal to the ancestor-gods upon whom are projected the powers that the child experiences in relation to its parents; through the mysteries of the *digoma* which are associated with initiation and the fertility cult; and through the divinity of the queen whose concern it is to control nature in the interests of the tribe as a whole. This idea of the control of nature by the chief on behalf of the tribe is not unique; it is common among the Bantu tribes of South Africa. But the Lovedu emphasis is on the divine origin and special affinity with nature of the queen herself, whereas in tribes such as the Zulu and Tsonga, where the mystical relation of the chief to his people and his powers over nature have to be achieved by magical strengthening on his accession and to be renewed periodically, it is largely by means of the magic of the royal regalia that the chief is able to exercise control. Among all, including Lovedu, one of the most important factors in the powers and position of the chief is the fact that he is the living representative of the long line of royal ancestors (tribal gods). There is considerable overlapping of these four categories among the Lovedu. Thus ancestors are kept satisfied and happy by a charm placed in their shrine; the queen controls rain not only through her divinity but also by means of medicines and charms and appeals to her ancestors who can prevent her from making rain. Let us consider these means for the control of nature in greater detail.

Vupuga (skilled use of power concentrated in persons and objects)

The forces of nature may be manipulated through properties intrinsic in various objects, animate and inanimate. The substances in which these attributes or powers (*maoja*) reside are mainly *mulimo* (medicines) or *mure* (plants). But the term medicines in this context has a wider connotation than the parallel term among us; it includes both medicine and magic, and is a medico-magical conceptual category which to the Lovedu is quite distinct

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from the supernatural. While anyone who knows a cure for an ailment is manipulating the forces of nature and using *vupuga*, there are doctors who, by virtue of long training, know many medicines, have learnt how to divine and have been imbued with additional perspicacity and powers as a result of a special initiation. Medicine functions by virtue of the properties, actual or ascribed, of matter; the principles underlying the operation of medicines assume mechanical cause and effect and even the divining bones are read according to rule.

There are, however, two types of doctor who fall into a different category: the *lelopo* doctor, directly possessed and guided by an ancestor spirit, who largely confines his activities to curing possessed people, and the *mugome* or 'smeller-out' who is generally a foreigner. People using the forces of nature for evil purposes are *vaiti* (witches and sorcerers) and are dealt with in another context. *Vupuga*, it will be seen, is the use of impersonal power inherent in matter, which is extracted by the expert (*mupuga*) and applied in the interests of the health and well-being of men; it is also the exercise of personal qualities or skills, either inherited or acquired through spirit possession or guidance.

Ancestors

Ancestors can influence for good and evil the fortunes only of their own descendants, who in the case of the chief's ancestors are taken to include the whole tribe. Their control over the forces of nature is not explicitly formulated; and what is expressly stated is not always confirmed in Lovedu religious practices. The ancestors are clearly conceived to exercise an overall control. A man will always assert that no harm or illness can befall him if his ancestors are watchful enough, for they have power to ward off all evil and misfortune. It is said that even witches cannot, without the will of the ancestors, enter a village or deliver the last fatal blow that kills a man. But in practice the will of the ancestors either is not interposed, for no ascertainable reason, or is ineffective to ward off attacks. If some great sorrow overtakes a man, it is said that 'his ancestors have had an accident' implying that he has been temporarily deprived of their protection and is at the mercy of his enemies. Even medicines are said to be ineffective without the co-operation of one's ancestors, the conception being not merely that their goodwill is essential but also that *vupuga* belongs to the ancestors. In fact, however, the ineffectiveness of medicines is never in any concrete case attributed to the lack of such co-operation.

Ancestors are appealed to and thanked for good crops, fertility, plenty, and all manner of good fortune and success. The desire to be remembered and given tendance is attributed to them, and they may themselves cause harm and sickness to descendants who neglect them; but somewhat inconsistently a man may with impunity neglect them for many years and give them tendance only when misfortune overtakes him. Ancestors may be approached and propitiated or thanked by means of offerings and prayer

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and the use of *dithugula*, objects such as beads which have once been in their possession; but they can also be constrained by medicine or the properties of matter.

Ancestors are capricious: their complaints as seen in the divining bones are usually about being neglected; but they may cause illness to those they love most in order to receive recognition, have their name perpetuated, or their beads worn. They are said to 'hold' the woman experiencing difficult labour, to afflict children with sore eyes, and even to prevent the queen from making rain. Their complaints need imply no omission or neglect on the part of the afflicted descendant, but merely some special desire that could not have been anticipated. The degree of either neglect or tendance bears no relation to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, since the ascription of misfortune to the ancestors is always *ex post facto*: hence the paradox that a family that is assiduous in its tendance of the ancestors may suffer more ill health and misfortune than one that has neglected the ancestors for a long time.

Dithugula are instrumental in controlling nature not only indirectly through the ancestors but also directly by virtue of the substances used in them. A *thugula* may be a shrine to an ancestor (male or female), an animal dedicated to him, old beads or objects of iron to which, owing to their having once been in his possession, power to influence him is attributed. But a *thugula* may also be any charm of herbs concocted by a doctor and worn for protective purposes. The queen's rain-medicines are *dithugula*. The most important religious ceremony of the year, the annual offering of beer to ancestors as thanksgiving for the harvest, is also called *thugula*. *Dithugula* thus constitute a category of objects, usually closely associated with the ancestors (though they may be made by a doctor), through which they may be approached, and which have special virtue particularly to give health and protection against ills and epidemics.

Dithugula are found in every lineage which, through its shrines, dedicated animals, and charms, secures the general welfare of its members. The queen's *dithugula*, her rain-medicines, sacred objects, and shrines through which she intercedes with the royal ancestors, are the ultimate symbols of her power and the safeguards of the welfare of the country; and just as certain medicines (*diphaba*), which are used in shrines or offerings to make the ancestors forget their complaints, are pegged round the village by the paternal aunt or sister of its head to protect it against witches, so also the queen may *thugula* the whole country by sending boys to peg medicated sticks on its boundaries as a protection against evil, particularly epidemics that might threaten it from outside.

The queen's control

The basis of the queen's control over nature is her divinity. So bound up is she with nature that her very emotions affect the rain. The complex of royal institutions includes the conceptions that she must be without

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physical imperfections, not susceptible to the ills that befall ordinary men; that she cannot die a natural death but departs only by her own volition; that succession to the throne is uncertain since the choice of a ruler must in the last resort be made by the spirits of the tribe; that though she may not have a husband, lest political control become concentrated in him, yet she must bear the heir by a secret consort (a royal classificatory brother) specially chosen to maintain untarnished the purity of the royal blood; that she ensures the regularity of nature and the changing of the seasons; and, more particularly, that her death dislocates the rhythm of nature, bringing drought and famine, the abrogation of law and order. People today still speak with horror and fear of the years (1894–6) following the death of the previous queen, Majuji II. They were years, as we know from documentary sources, when drought, locusts, rinderpest and, in their wake, unprecedented famine and desolation, wiped out practically all the cattle and perhaps a third of the human population.

The preservation of the queen's sanctity requires that her life be subject to observances which shield her from the public eye and restrain her movements. She is 'the huckster in the hut' (*mushava-ndoni*) who sells her rain-medicines from the seclusion of her abode, and may not move about freely or leave the district of the capital. She was the only chief in the Union who, a few years ago, could not go to the Native Commissioners' Office to exercise the vote of her people in the election of a representative to the Native Representative Council. She cannot attend large assemblies of men, and is generally inaccessible except to her close relatives and great councillors. But otherwise her activities are not restricted, nor is her life a continuous ritual and, unlike other Divine Kings, there are no elaborate safeguards surrounding her every movement.

Tradition decrees that chiefs may have no physical defect, but not that they must die while still young and strong. Ritual suicide of the queen is by Lovedu conceptions not a means of guaranteeing a timely death lest failure of physical powers should upset the regularity of nature, but rather a symbol of her divinity, for it proves that she is not heir to the weaknesses of ordinary man. It is mystically connected with the fourth circumcision school in her reign: she must see the boys going in but not coming back. The Lovedu queen is believed to be immune from disease, but age does not diminish—it even increases—her mystical powers over nature. The only disqualification to rule is inability to make rain in the early period of her reign. Once she has demonstrated, by her ability to make rain, that the rain-charms have been entrusted to her and that she has been divinely chosen, irregularities in the seasons are attributed not to weakness of her powers but to some extraneous factor, such as contraventions of rules associated with keeping the country cool, disobedience to the chief, and the anger of the ancestor spirits.

Arrangements connected with succession of a new queen also emphasize her mystical relations with the cosmic order. The death of her predecessor

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was not announced for a year, while, as the body decomposed, such vital ingredients of the rain-medicine as the skin and body-dirt were carefully collected; after the announcement a period of anarchy often supervened as rival claimants marshalled their armed forces for the struggle for the throne. At the end of this year of mourning all the fires of the country were put out with purificatory rain-medicine (*mufugo*) from the official keeper at the capital.

This fire rite symbolizes purification of the country as well as a transition from one order to another. At any time when the country is not right (*naha a e loge*), as when there is severe drought, the fires are put out 'to usher in a new year' (i.e. a new order or period of operative forces). But the fire rite also symboli[illegible] the means through which the allegiance of subjects and the authority [illegible] the queen are asserted. Finally, the beating out of the fires with cooling medicine is part of a complex of practices connected with heat and cold, symbolizing respectively dysphoria and euphoria. The 'earth is hot' (*mavu a fesa*) on the death of the queen and a new cosmic order has to be inaugurated by cooling it in preparation for the new rain-maker.

After the fire rite there follows the divine identification of the successor by the rite of opening the door. The rival claimants, one of whom, chosen by the inner royal council and the deceased queen, has been secretly prepared for his office, pass the hut in which the queen has died. They announce their identity to the spirit of the deceased, lightly touching the door of the hut, which yields to the chosen successor.

In and around the inner secret council where the choice is actually made centre serious tensions, not only between the present ruler and the heir-elect for whose sake and succession she must poison herself, apparently not always willingly, but also between those who depend for their position and prestige upon the patronage of one or the other. The 'chosen' heir always goes to live far away, ostensibly to conceal his or her identity but in reality also owing to a serious conflict with the reigning sovereign.[1]

For the regulation of cosmic forces the queen relies not only on her divinity but also upon the royal rain-medicines and, in the last resort, on the agreement of the royal ancestor spirits. To prevent the weakening of the rain-medicine it must be revitalized by being given the first termites and first-fruits each year, and occasionally parts of a black sheep or, in the old days, a human being.

Rain-charms are liable to weaken (*figehela*) or become defiled (*khuma*) by certain deviations from the normal course of nature unless special precautions are taken. Twins, babies cutting their upper teeth before their lower, women dying in pregnancy, abortions and miscarriages, men dying from *dere*, a deadly coughing disease believed to be contracted by having sex intercourse with a woman who has had a miscarriage or abortion or whose child has died before weaning—all these are deviations which contaminate the earth, causing it to be 'hot', and therefore have to be buried in wet soil or

[1] Males are not debarred from succession; indeed the early rulers were all men. But a definite preference for women rulers seems now to be firmly established.

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cooled with rain-medicine. The polluted corpse (called *pukudi*, the opposite of *fuga*) is thought of as thrusting up an arm and waving it about to disperse the rain.

It is the duty of the queen each year to *thetsa* 'establish' the season propitiously for her people. Certain district heads who are close relatives of the queen have rainpots which they revitalize every year with medicine from the queen and stir them up at the queen's command to ensure a propitious season. In the old days the year was 'established' also by the beating of the sacred drums (*gɔmana*) and a visit to the royal ancestor graves, but this has fallen into disuse.

If there is drought or if the rain does not come at its appropriate time, people say the queen has not changed the year properly and steps are taken to approach her. Royal relatives may approach her personally or complain in her hearing that she is killing her people by withholding rain; district heads may formally pay homage (*hu lova*) with gifts of £1 or a head of cattle, or may bring a troupe of dancers to please her and invoke her pity at the spectacle of people dancing when they should be hoeing. The songs (*lesugu*) are associated with offerings to the ancestors and with rain. If these efforts are of no avail diviners are consulted to determine the cause of drought—the rain-charms may have been 'weakened' or evil practices of witches may have prevented rain. In 1937 the people were told at a tribal gathering to report lightning 'sent' by witches, and shortly afterwards, when lightning had struck a tree near a village, boys were sent to sprinkle every house in the area with *mufugo* to 'cool' the lightning. Witches may also disperse rain by hanging up medicated branches which sway in the air. If it is an ancestor that is 'holding the queen's hands' he or she has to be propitiated by the sacrifice of a black beast or sheep on the grave.

When winds frustrate the efforts of the queen to make rain, especially when a gale disperses auspicious black clouds, people come to condole with her as if she had lost a relative, and it is taboo to work in the fields the next day, just as it is on the day after the first rain of the season and on certain other occasions.

The queen is 'Transformer of the Clouds', the changer of the seasons, and guarantor of their cyclic regularity, but she can exercise her powers auspiciously only in certain conditions and in 'agreement with the ancestors'.

Digɔma

The fourth category of forces by which nature is regulated in the interests of man consists of *digɔma* which are associated more especially with changes in the status of man. A *gɔma* is primarily a drum, but as an abstract concept it is particularly identified with the power concentrated in the drum cult. This cult includes the large complex of institutions connected with rites of transition, of which the year-long *vyali-vuhwera* (fertility cult) is one. A *gɔma* is thought of as something mystical and secret, awesome and esoteric. The circumcision 'school' for boys is called a *gɔma* which is said to 'bite'

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the initiates. It is something mystically powerful which transforms boys into men. But if the initiation as a whole is a *gɔma*, so also are the secret formulae, objects, and mummeries that form part of the ceremony.

With the *vyali-vuhwera* fertility cult, which is at the same time also an initiation for girls (*vyali*) and for boys (*vuhwera*), are associated many *digɔma*, in the form of masked figures in costumes made of grass, reeds, and leaves, or plays and mummeries emphasizing the value of certain foods. But the greatest of all is *Khiudogane*, Bird of Muhale (the royal founder ancestor), ruling spirit of the *vyali*, which is believed to emerge from a pool on moonlight nights, leave mists behind it when it departs, and upon which much of the ritual centres. It is the link between two aspects of sacred forces, that conceived as mysterious, fearful, approached only through elaborate symbolism, and that represented by ancestors and directly approached. For the bird is both a great *gɔma* and a symbol of the royal ancestors.

Revived in 1938, after an interval of twenty years, the *vyali-vuhwera* with its great *digɔma* is thought to promote abundance and rain, the welfare and happiness of the people. While it lasts it is the main national interest to which all energies are bent and all activities subordinated. Marriages are held up, the normal judicial machinery is at a standstill, and anything that might compete with the ceremonial is interdicted. Since initiates spend only early mornings and evenings at the secret enclosure, they sleep at home and are able to carry on essential domestic tasks for the greater part of the day.

The sacred drums of the tribe (*digɔma*), four in number, are kept and cared for by the people of Ravothata, a lineage that came from Phalaborwa, where the drum cult is more intimately connected with the chief than among the Lovedu. These drums, which are said to contain under the resonator a human skull and, in the case of the smallest, the facial skin of a councillor, are mystically linked with the life of the queen and the welfare of the tribe. The heir sits on the smallest drum while being taught the rain ritual and it must accompany the queen if ever she is forced to flee from her enemies. The sacred drums are spoken of as *vadimo* (gods) as well as *digɔma*, and they were beaten twice a year in the old days in a ceremony known as *gɔmana* as an appeal to the ancestors for rain and to thank them for the harvest. The latter took the form of an initiation into the secrets of the cult at which boys were given certain cuts on their faces.

Associated with the sacred drums and also classed as *digɔma* are the *zwidajani*, the weird whistling ancestor spirits of the royal lineage who come to earth in the guise, it is said, of half-men with one eye, one arm, and one leg, to take part in the rites connected with the sacred drums and in the annual harvest *thugula* ceremony in all royal and certain other lineages. They are, in fact, as is known to those initiated in the *gɔmana*, old men masquerading as spirits. They appear in the bush near the village and join in the singing of *lesugu* songs which are sung, on these occasions, through specially constructed secret whistles.

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The *gɔmana* drums are no longer used by the queen to appeal to the ancestors for rain, but she permits boys from the royal village to attend *gɔmana* initiation ceremonies held occasionally, with her permission, by an outsider. The *gɔmana* concept, despite the support it gives to the mystical attributes of the queen, appears to represent a conceptual pattern that is autonomous and more fully developed in some neighbouring tribes, where the moments of the agricultural year were signalized by the sounding of the drums which were thought to bring rain and fertility, to bless the crops and cattle, and to safeguard the country from disease and enemies. In some tribes today the cult is a recent innovation in the form of initiation schools managed by outsiders who have their own drums and *zwidajani* visitors from tribes where the cult is better known.

Evil and how to avoid it

It has been shown that the Lovedu conceive the order of nature as something essentially man-controlled through the power of medicine and magic (*vuŋaga*), through the ancestors, through the divinity and powers of the queen, and through the mysterious forces associated with *digɔma*. The seasons and the rain have to be established by the queen for the crops to prosper; the baby 'grows by medicines' which guard it from harm and sickness and imbue it with health and strength; adulthood is achieved through initiations and *digɔma*; and over and above all, there is the watchful care of the gods. The natural order accordingly can and must be manipulated by utilizing benevolent and nullifying malignant forces, in order to further man's good fortune or to prevent evil from befalling him.

The Lovedu have elaborated some interesting concepts of impersonal evil powers which are concentrations of forces brought about by certain concatenations of conditions or events. These concepts are found over a much wider area, but have received special emphasis among the Lovedu. To them the ultimate good is rain. Rain is regarded as not merely the material source of life and happiness and the physical basis of man's sense of security; it is also a symbol of spiritual well-being and a manifestation that the social order is operating smoothly. Hence coolness denotes a state of euphoria: man and matter to be in order and to function properly have to be kept cool; angry ancestors must be cooled by means of medicine; even witches can be cooled and so made to forget their evil purposes. On the other hand, heat as the antithesis of the main basis of man's security, the cooling, life-giving rain, is conceived as a destructive force leading to a state of dysphoria.

'Heat' is a concept suggested by the physical properties of heat; it may sometimes be sensed, for example, as an important factor in fever, one of the most prevalent illnesses. But actually its operation is inferred from conditions of which 'heat' is clearly the cause, such as droughts and the desiccation of the crops. Here the generation of heat is ascribed to the effect upon the earth of disturbances of the regular course of nature by the burial in it

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of twins, abortions, miscarriages, and women dying in childbirth, or by the cosmic chaos resulting from the death of the chief. 'Hot blood' is one of the commonest causes of illness. *Leswa* (burning) is primarily a physiological condition of a woman resulting from abortion and it may be transmitted to the man who has intercourse with her, who then contracts the dreaded and fatal *dɛrɛ*, a coughing disease considered to be quite different from consumption (*lefiha*). 'Heat' affects the physical potency of medicines and charms, the mental repose of the gods, the mysterious powers of *dithugula*, and the welfare of the whole country. It stirs (*dzusa*) the gods to anger and it activates the criminal propensities of witches.

'Heat' and 'cold', then, are all-important conceptual categories which are brought into relation with the functioning of the physical, mental, and emotional forces in man, in the ancestors, and in nature. Wherever 'heat' is considered to be generated, the proper antidote is the administration of 'cooling' medicines, i.e. substances which have the property of counteracting the heat or soothing the burning. The remedy is to put right what is wrong (*hu logisa*), to secure a return to normal conditions by cooling agencies. If the whole country is in an abnormal condition (*a e loge*, literally, is not right) all the fires must be sprinkled with *mufugo* medicine (*hu fuga* means to blow upon with a cool breeze). Sources of heat to the earth, e.g. twins, abortions, must be buried in wet soil; ancestor spirits aroused by 'heat' (anger) have to be calmed by squirting water (*hu phasa*) on objects once in their possession or over their graves. Cooling medicines likewise counteract that burning of the fingers which constrains witches to do evil, while charms protecting the village against witches are often called *mashɔthɔjɔ* (things causing coolness). In all these cases the active reagent in the medicines is some substance having 'cooling' properties, such as the river stones guarding the entrance to villages or built into shrines of ancestors, the succulent bulbs used in the rite for the removal of the 'dirt' (*khitshila*) of death, the great overhanging fig-trees shading shrines, the green undigested chyme from a sheep or goat's alimentary canal that figures prominently in ritual. Much medical ingenuity goes into the manufacture of powders and decoctions which, owing to their special cooling properties, will counteract heat; and it is not surprising that the Lovedu way of curing malaria is to seek drugs that will drive out the 'heat' by means of profuse perspiration. 'Heat' is most commonly caused by abnormalities associated with the procreation and the actual or threatened destruction of human life—hence the close association of 'heat' with sex, reproduction, and death.

Another malignant force, *muridi* (shadow), is conceived as evil cast by certain conditions. It infects those upon whom it falls, but if they are healthy, the effect upon them is invisible and harmless, though they become carriers who may transmit the contagion to others with whom they come into contact, especially those whose resistance is weak, such as new-born babies and sick people. 'Shadow' thus explains the spread of contagion, not by direct contact but through an intermediate unaffected carrier. *Muridi* is

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not a real or mystical shadow in our sense of the term, but an evil and contagious force conceptualized, on the analogy of a shadow, as an invisible counterpart of certain conditions. The sources of 'shadow' are such conditions or events as death, activities connected with human reproduction, including sex intercourse, the early stages of pregnancy, birth of twins, miscarriage (regarded as death), women during confinement, irregular appearance of the teeth, e.g. upper incisor before lower or molar before incisor. 'Shadow' is accordingly connected with many of the same kind of irregularities as generate 'heat', but it appears to be differentiated as an independent concept for the purpose of dealing with its effects on the health of people who are peculiarly susceptible to defilement.

Precautions are taken to protect the sick against the influence of *muridi*. A sick person is smeared with medicines or quarantined like a new-born child by means of a medicated stick placed across the entrance to his hut to warn off carriers of 'shadow' and counteract the 'shadow' of anyone unaware of his condition. If there is an epidemic in a village and the general vitality and resistance consequently are lowered, people may be told to refrain from sex intercourse lest *muridi* make the illness worse. In the smallpox epidemic of 1938 people cohabiting were said to have the disease in a worse form than others. When a child is ill, its parents refrain from sex intercourse. A warrior who slept with his wife the night before battle would be easy prey to the enemy. A man sleeping with his wife may not approach a slaughtered animal before its stomach has been pierced nor help skin it without first smearing his hands with (usually cooling) medicine, lest *muridi* affect the meat and cause stomach trouble (*makhuma*) to those eating it. Children whose teeth appear irregularly (*leshega*) are full of *muridi* and were killed in the old days. But today they are treated by a doctor and have to be careful never to bite others, for the wound will not heal and there is always difficulty in obtaining the necessary antidote, namely, scrapings from the teeth of the *leshega*. Cross-roads and river fords are secondary sources of *muridi* since the 'shadow' carried by unsuspecting hosts infects these places. For this reason pregnant women are not supposed to go on long journeys from home.

Muridi is a much more limited concept than 'heat'; it is invoked mainly to account for the aggravation of illness or the susceptibility to illness or other injury of persons contacting defilement. It does not affect the country generally, and it furnishes an alternative to witchcraft as an explanation of the aggravation of ailments or the failure of illnesses to yield to ordinary remedies.

Muridi in a more virulent form is called *leridi* (ominous or menacing shadow), which infects a warrior who has killed an enemy and who is in grave danger of becoming mad or very quarrelsome unless purified. An allied concept is that of *letala* (sinister track) derived from the idea that, if a woman is cohabiting with two men one of whom gets ill, the track of the other, should he approach near or within earshot of the sick person, will

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cause the latter to die by aggravating his illness. Similarly a man's mistress must avoid coming near the hut of his wife when she is ill or in childbirth, lest the mistress's sinister track endanger the life of the wife.

Makhuma (from *hu khuma*, to mix) is a concept which uses the analogy of contamination by mixture or contact to account for physical weakening, wasting away or enfeeblement (*hu figchela*). The situations that constitute the chief source of *makhuma* are critical transitions in the life of the individual as well as serious crises such as severe illnesses. The evil contaminates or infects the person who has undergone the change or who, in the case of death, comes into contact with its baneful influence. He seems to suffer from loss of vitality, or to become dislocated because of the change in his condition.

The measures taken to combat *makhuma* are in the first instance preventive. Strengthening medicines are administered or inoculated to fortify the individual by anticipation; thereafter, under isolating conditions that are gradually relaxed, an adjustment is made to the new situation. Thus novices in the various initiations are medically treated in anticipation of their susceptibility to *khuma* on entering their new condition. Babies are fortified (*hu thuswa*, to be helped) by scarification and steaming before they leave the hut of confinement; kin and other inmates of the village must after a death be readjusted by means of medicines and other treatment to the change caused by the death lest they *khuma*. *Makhuma* also affects possessed people who fail to use medicine with the first-fruits. A man will *khuma* if he cohabits with a woman after the death of her child unless she has first been medically purified, and she must also be careful not to give food to other children before treatment lest they get ill and die. If one baby dies, any illness its successor may have is liable to be diagnosed as due to *makhuma*. Even cattle may *khuma* after a death in the village or if a woman enters the cattle fold.

By logical extension and the invocation of a further series of presuppositions the concept is applied to the bones of a diviner, which are liable to *khuma* (lose their diagnostic powers) every month—they are said to 'see their moons'—or when used to divine about a death, and must be washed in medicine before being used again. Similarly the queen's rain-medicine will *khuma* unless given the first termites and first-fruits, or when people neglect observances connected with the burial of those who are 'hot'.

The evils differently conceptualized in the notions of 'heat', *makhuma* and 'shadow' have this in common: they are all instances of a ritual impurity, generated by certain states or conditions, not because of their morally reprehensible nature but because of their abnormality or their relation to reproductive processes or critical changes in life. 'Heat' and 'shadow' appear to be different aspects of the same kind of ritual impurity, but 'shadow' is dangerous only to someone whose resistance is low because of illness or immaturity, while 'heat' may have deleterious effects not only on healthy people but on natural phenomena, on ancestor spirits, and on

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783 charms or *digɔma*. *Makhuma* which arises from critical transitions causes mainly stomach trouble and general debility in men and cattle; but it also causes weakening of the mystical powers concentrated in sacred objects. These ritual forces do not strike down the guilty person: it is, for example, not the husband who will be revenged if the adulterer approaches the hut of his wife; or when a woman has procured an abortion, it is not she but her innocent lover who will be affected with *dɛrɛ*, the most dreaded disease among the Lovedu. The harmful effects of all these forms of impurity are not sanctions against the acts or events causing the impurity, but sanctions for taking the necessary precautions to remove the impurity and prevent it from spreading to others, or from causing some calamity not necessarily affecting the guilty person. And, as so often happens in Lovedu society, it is generally *ex post facto*, and as an explanation of some illness or evil that these conceptions are invoked and steps are taken to put things right.

784 The concatenations of actions and conditions that must be avoided lest they bring about misfortune and evil to men are wider than what is included in the conceptions of 'heat', *muridi*, and *makhuma*. Many things or natural objects brought into relation with men have evil consequences and must be avoided: they are taboo (*hu ila*). Burning a certain kind of wood in the village causes quarrels; working in the fields the day after the first rain is taboo, not sanctioned by a penalty but the breach of which is a bane (*lesola*) that may portend evil. The breach of these taboos is disapproved but leads to no organized reaction or public indignation even where it affects the welfare of all, as in the case of a wrong burial. A man who sleeps with his wife while she is still suckling a child may thereby cause the death of his child; but it is his own foolish and inconsiderate conduct that causes the mother's breast to *khuma* (become polluted and weakened), and it is not the concern of outsiders. He is a fool rather than criminal.

753 Many things in nature are recognized as directly affecting man adversely; various foods and drinks cause stomach troubles; poisonous weeds may kill cattle which, like men, occasionally die of old age; many minor illnesses are attributed to natural causes, e.g. one may contract malaria by walking in the dew in the early morning. Epidemics may be brought about naturally by the air or wind (*phɛfo*). 'Ward off from us these winds' is a constant plea [821] in prayers to the ancestors. Hot, dry winds which drive away rain-bearing clouds or dissolve them in thunderstorms or gales are thought to be specially detrimental to the rain, and it is the duty of the ancestors to keep away such winds. Even anxiety or worry wears a man down (*hu seda mutho a hom-* [828] *chwa*, lit., scrapes a man thin). A woman who is prone to break her pots is not bewitched; she has *khifyaisa*, a natural propensity for breaking, which can be cured by medicine.

777 The Lovedu also have the conception of natural accident (*gozi*) and of luck (*leshuto*), though bad luck is sometimes attributed to breach of obligations to kin, to malicious gossip, or to the misconduct in one's absence of one's wife.

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An omen or bane (*lesola*) presages death or disaster, but it may itself be the cause of the evil that follows. An owl hooting outside a hut, cats crying plaintively (not caterwauling) at night, presage disaster, for cats have uncanny insight; a mountain snake can be a *lesola*, and so can a *leshega*, i.e. a person whose teeth have appeared in the wrong order. A person will *tola* another, i.e. cause misfortune or death to descend upon a member of the latter's family, by swearing badly at him, especially if the words are out of all proportion to the offence or provocation.

These concepts of natural luck, accident, and omens are thus also linked with human relationships. Good relations with near relatives may bring you good luck, bad relations, especially with your father or father's sister, bad luck or illness to your children. In fact any man who despises the great, particularly his father, will, it is said, see him in the bones as the cause of his misfortune, especially if the old man dies before a reconciliation has been effected. An old man's scolding or curse is an omen (*vusola*) which portends and causes misfortune to a near relative of the person scolded, and the grievance of one's sister or father's sister, even if it is unconscious, generates a force (*mahava*) which brings illness upon one's children and which can be neutralized only by a religious rite. The exact relation between *mahava* and the ancestors is not very clear. The Lovedu conceive *mahava* as following automatically from the bad relationship between important kin. Yet reconciliation, which removes the source of the *mahava*, is not enough for putting matters right. It is the ancestors that must remove the illness at the request of the aggrieved party.

Witchcraft and Sorcery (Vulɔi)

The evils that have so far been mentioned are either inherent in nature or only vaguely brought into relation with the conduct and relationships between men. Their effects except in a few cases are mild, rarely ending in death. In a completely different category is the greatest and most devastating source of evil *vulɔi* (witchcraft and sorcery), brought about directly by man. *Vulɔi* is, by Lovedu conceptions, always due to the conscious, evil practices of man and is directed at persons he has reason to hate.[1] *Vulɔi* is morally reprehensible, and witches and sorcerers are the arch enemies of society. The concept of *vulɔi* explains evil in terms of the malicious wickedness in men's hearts; it is criminality incarnate in man. The term *vulɔi* covers both witchcraft and sorcery; nevertheless the Lovedu make a clear distinction between witchcraft (*vulɔi vya vusiu*—night witchcraft) and sorcery (*vulɔi vya matsiare*—day witchcraft). The night-witch uses sinister inherited powers which extend beyond the ordinary course of nature. The sorcerer uses the natural, known powers of medicine for anti-social ends. Witchcraft implies possession of power to do evil transcending the under-

[1] Neighbouring Venda and Tsonga conceive the witch as constrained to evil by heredity but unconscious of his own evil acts.

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754 standing of ordinary men; sorcery is the manipulation of lawful means for unlawful ends.

The night-witch belongs to an unholy fraternity whose members meet at night to dance to their drums and deliberate upon their deeds of darkness. She uses no medium of destruction and no medicine or spells, but has inborn powers to do what is physically impossible to ordinary men. She goes herself on her nefarious errands or uses familiars. Witches are almost invariably women, partly no doubt because it is difficult to conceive of women having the facilities to purchase medicines for purposes of sorcery, partly also because they are endowed with more mysterious powers than men. The sorcerer, usually a man, whose machinations involve the use of medicines and spells, is a day-witch because his power is derived from ordinary natural techniques 'of the day'. The essence of sorcery is the criminal use of the potency of medicines which can be, and usually are, used in the service of legitimate ends.

754 Many medicines are specifically good or bad and their use cannot traverse their intrinsic nature; but some of the most important are good and hence
673 moral, or bad and hence immoral according as they are used for socially approved or socially disapproved ends. *Madabi*, for example, has the power to transmute the nature of things. It is right for a husband to manipulate *madabi* in a way that will cause wild animals to appear while his runaway spouse works for her lover, for in this way he may frighten her into returning to him. But a jilted lover who takes revenge upon a girl is guilty of sorcery if he uses *madabi* to change her sex when her child is about to be born and thereby endangers her life. Such an act is unlawful vengeance, which is sharply distinguished from lawful restitution; it reflects a desire to injure another for personal motives which are not in harmony with approved social values.

754 Witchcraft and sorcery can always be counteracted. A favourite method of dealing with a witch is the use of reprisal magic whereby the evil is sent
789 back to him, but there are many charms and medicines, all relying on the power of *vuyaga*, by means of which witchcraft can be combated or rendered harmless. Villages are protected against witches and sorcerers by charms circling the village or placed at strategic points, while the witch within the village is treated by *hu fera*, i.e. a drug is introduced into his food which has the power of making him forget his frustration and seek compensation in day-dreaming and doddering. After witchcraft or sorcery has been established by divination as the cause of an evil, and the culprit has been identified (the diviner mentions no name but gives certain attributes, such as sex, clan, locality), it is open to the victim to make an accusation and risk the legal proceedings that will inevitably follow. But resort to law is not entirely satisfactory since appeasement, not the hardening of animosities that accusations occasion, is the function of law. Moreover, the initiation of legal sanctions against a witch may spur him to greater activity.

777 Witch beliefs reflect the Lovedu notion that almost all the misfortunes

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that befall men, whether sickness, barrenness, lightning that strikes men, huts, or cattle, failure of an individual's crops, or death of his children, are caused by the hatred and envy in men's hearts.

There is no greater fear than the fear that gnaws at the heart of a Lovedu who suspects he has been bewitched. Yet he is not impotent before its onslaught. By ascribing destructive forces, disease, and other evil to witchcraft and sorcery, and at the same time believing in the power of magic (*rungaga*) to counteract witchcraft, a Lovedu is able to feel that he is master of his own fate. Evil in the world on this theory becomes intelligible, not arbitrary and capricious. This is an ordered and just world in which evil, being held to express itself largely in witchcraft and sorcery, is outlawed and criminal, and in which good ultimately triumphs. And if this projective system affords a convenient theory of failure, it also stresses the virtue of goodwill for human welfare.

Relationships of Man to Man

That the greatest source of all evil should be the envy and jealousies in men's hearts is in keeping with the emphasis everywhere in Lovedu social life on the importance of good relationships between man and man. Bad relations and non-fulfilment of obligations between kin may, as we have seen, cause not only bad luck, through ancestral displeasure, but even illness, through the automatic force of *mahava*. The dissatisfaction in a mother's heart, whether conscious or not, in connexion with her daughter's marriage may cause her sterility, just as the complaints of a sister may be the cause, as seen in the bones, of the illness of her brother's children. The queen's emotions, too, affect the rain and it becomes important, therefore, for the welfare of all that she should not be sad or displeased.

Dominating relations between individuals and between groups is the whole pattern of mutuality, co-operation, and long-run reciprocities in the social structure. 'One leg cannot dance a *gɔsha*' say the Lovedu; co-operation is essential for the tasks of life. Security is bound up with the mutualities of kin, cognatic, agnatic, and affinal. In a society where wealth cannot be accumulated, it is not surprising that men's efforts should be directed towards building up and maintaining through generations links of marriage and kinship with all that these imply. These reciprocities in the society are motivated by unavoidable necessity but they are long-run ones. There is no weighing up of one service against another, nor any attempt to seek prestige by lavishness. Moreover, it is sharing and helpfulness not the display of one's generosity that is wanted.

Side by side with the emphasis on give and take, the society provides in such a manner for the place and achievement of individuals that competitiveness is limited and aggressive traits are outlawed. The immediate goals of individuals are divergent, and men are not conceived as striving against one another for the attainment of the same end. There is no special prestige

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attached to possession and no socio-economic stratification of classes; for a great man, whether he be poor or rich, is first and foremost a royal relative, and the purpose of economic activities is self-sufficiency and independence. Trade is disliked and competition is absent even in craftsmanship. So marked is the disinclination to make comparisons that it is difficult to obtain any expression of opinion concerning the relative merits of things that Europeans quite naturally compare, such as the achievements of individuals or objects of craftsmanship.

Children are taught 'to be like others', not to strive to outdo them and precociousness is disliked. A child asking for sweets often says 'Give me also', even if no one else has been given any on that occasion. He begs for what others may receive, not a special advantage for himself. When favours are asked from the ancestors the prayer is quite often phrased, 'Give us also', or 'Let him have health like others'. To stress, before the ancestors, a desire for personal achievement in competition with or greater than that of others would be improper. Contrast with this the opportunities for and love of competition in Zulu society where every boy is constantly measuring himself against others, vieing with them in fights, in dress, in love-making, in dancing, for leadership and praise.

The give and take, absence of competitiveness, and lack of force in the social and political structure, make moderation the keynote of Lovedu social life. Outstanding individuals are not tolerated: a show of forcefulness on the part of a councillor one day, which appealed to us as an indication of efficiency unusual in the society, was apologized for with the excuse that he must have been drunk. Display of all kinds is disliked. The elaborate beadwork and interest in dress, so characteristic of the Zulu, are absent, and there is nothing to correspond to the institutionalized public boasting (*ukugiya*) —jumping and stabbing at an imaginary foe to the accompaniment of a string of praises—that plays so important a role in Zulu life.

Excess of every kind is deprecated. Speed is undignified. Things must be done *ga vuya*, slowly, at a regular pace, in a moderate and dignified manner. Excess in human relations, like heat in the cosmic order, is liable to bring disaster. The reaction to death is calm, quiet grief, not the funeral wail of the Nguni or the terror reaction of the Tsonga. Too much weeping by a mother is believed to call down evil upon the next child born to her. Mputa was born a cripple, because, so we were told, his mother, Makwadu, wept bitterly at the death of her first son. Even in scolding moderation has to be observed, for scolding out of proportion to the offence, can, as we have shown, bring evil, even death.

Quarrelsomeness is one of the worst offences. Congruent with this outlook, the murderer or the warrior who has killed an enemy must purify himself to avoid becoming quarrelsome, the threat of which is so unpalatable as to be a powerful sanction. But quarrels and conflicts do occur on account of temperamental qualities, conflicting interests, and other causes; they are also precipitated sometimes through imperfections in the social

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institutions or their inadequacy for meeting all situations. In the resolution of difficulties of this nature arbitration and compromise play an important role, both judicially and extra-judicially. The genius of the legal system even in its most formal aspects is the skilful use of the restitutive sanction, in its spiritual rather than its material sense. The fundamental objective is the re-establishment of relations that have become broken or strained, and that objective is achieved, not so much by vindicating rules as by reconciling the parties. There is indeed a tacit assumption that the social equilibrium will be maintained if personal relations are suitably adjusted. The primary task of the courts is therefore to smooth out personal difficulties rather than to settle legal issues. For in law as in life it is not the rule that is important but the personal and social relations. The cattle-linking of brother and sister from different 'houses', ordinarily disapproved, is an arrangement that agreement between the 'houses' makes possible, and if the parties agree, even murder can be compounded. Even when a diviner has found a man guilty of witchcraft, it is felt to be necessary that the culprit should 'agree' with the findings, i.e. accept the verdict of the bones. In judicial proceedings a defendant will be asked if he agrees to pay the award; if he disagrees, full latitude is allowed him to expostulate. Should the court sense a genuine grievance it will reopen the case and bring its decision more into line with an amicable adjustment. As laws and institutions exist for human beings, they are not ends in themselves, and even the most fundamental duties and obligations between individuals and groups are conditional upon the ever-invoked 'if they agree'. If people do not agree there can be no relationship. If they have to be coerced there cannot be genuine agreement. This is why the execution of a judgement is left to the parties. The whole social and political structure relies upon the maintenance of good relations without resort to compulsion. Hence the use of the mechanisms of marriage and bride-price to hold in willing allegiance a great diversity of alien groups, who outnumber the Lovedu proper by nine to one; hence also the aversion from regimentation and military discipline.

Great importance is attached to the dignity of the individual. Every person has rights and obligations; even a child's rights to property are respected. If a man feels that he is not being given his due, it is right to complain (*vilacla*) just as the ancestors do when they have not received proper attention. Any indignity to the personality, such as corporal punishment, is socially disapproved. Perhaps it is for this reason that a Lovedu soon becomes tractable if ordered by the court to carry stones or perform some other useless task when he has been guilty of 'despising' the court.

Suicide is not common, but when it is resorted to it is as a protest against wrongful accusations or as a result of the complete frustration of an individual forced against his will into an impossible situation, e.g. a girl forced to marry someone she dislikes.

A high value is placed on human life. An aspect of Western civilization that puzzles the Lovedu is that we tolerate the loss of human life involved

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in the use of motor traffic. Are not people more important than speed? The need for even a chief to respect the wishes of his subjects upon whom he depends for a following is summed up in the saying, *Vuhosi gi vatho*, 'chieftainship is people'.

The qualities or virtues that are stressed, then, in the moral code of the Lovedu are moderation and temperance, compromise and agreement, humility, respect for the personality and rights of others. Courage is not rated very high in this non-military society. Perseverance is often enjoined and is especially necessary in the monotonous tasks of hoeing, carrying heavy loads of wood, walking up steep mountain slopes; but it is never carried out with the single-mindedness that a European might expect. Theft is condemned and there are ritual sanctions against it. If the object stolen has been magically treated, for example, a painful sore will develop on the finger which defies treatment until guilt has been confessed and restitution agreed to. 'Don't steal, always beg (*hobela*) for what you want', children are exhorted. But theft is not a problem in this economically undifferentiated society, though nowadays cases of theft, even if extremely rarely, do come before the tribal courts. Drunkenness is bad only if it leads to neglect of duties or fights and quarrels. To be drunk is in itself no disgrace, it is merely pleasant and perhaps exhilarating, not a condition to be ashamed of. Indeed everyone looks forward to the *murula* season when all become slightly intoxicated from the cider made out of the fruits.

Right conduct is relative always to the human situation and morality is oriented not from any absolute standards of honesty or truth but from the social good in each situation. Conduct that promotes smooth relationships, that upholds the social structure, is good; conduct that runs counter to smooth social relationships is bad. Courtesy and the respect due to age or seniority are thus of greater importance than truth. A son-in-law who, tired of always being imposed upon by his wife's father, truthfully signified his unwillingness to help him by providing a goat would be guilty, in view of the special mutualities between families related by marriage, of unpardonable behaviour which might jeopardize his marriage. The correct procedure is to agree to help but to be always 'still looking for it' when approached for the goat. It took us a long time to discover that the right way to deal with incessant begging was not to refuse however politely, but to say 'I have none' or 'It is not mine to give'. The polite lie even if palpable is better calculated to maintain smooth relationships than strict adherence to truth. Truth is not good in itself nor is a lie always evil. Lies are objected to when they are socially inconvenient. Yet not only is it expected that a man will lie to get out of difficulties but there are cases in which lying is prescribed, as when children are told to lie to strangers if asked about village affairs. To keep tribal secrets and the secrets of initiation schools is of far greater importance than to tell the truth.

The social orientation of morality is clear in Lovedu sex morality. Sex is not regarded as a temptation to be resisted by painful efforts of will.

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There is nothing morally wrong in sex or the sex act; not only is sex play among small children connived at, but premarital sex relations are institutionalized. It is only having a child before marriage that is immoral. For adultery restitution must be made, yet a husband who is jealous and watches his wife too closely is despised, and most men and women have extra-marital lovers (*vatavo*). The Lovedu attitude is less strict than that of the Tsonga living among them, for Tsonga married women are expected to be faithful to their husbands, and the compensation and fine for adultery are far higher than among the Lovedu. The Lovedu attitude to sex is matter-of-fact, and obscenity in ritual does not have a prominent role. Sex is handled with moderation: men are warned against the dangers of promiscuity; they learn from their proverb that 'a woman's pubes may break up a family', but passion is not esteemed and sex techniques are undeveloped.

To anyone brought up in the West European culture, where every breach of the moral code is also a sin in the eyes of a God who may punish the wrongdoer either in this life or the hereafter, an arresting aspect of Lovedu culture is that there is only a vague connexion between the ancestor-gods and morality. It has been said for the South Bantu in general, and by more than one authority, that the ancestors 'are the guardians of the moral code, it is they in the first instance who are thought of as visiting on their descendants punishments for some omission or commission'[1] There is among Lovedu a vague idea that failure to carry out one's kinship obligations may bring ancestral displeasure in the form of bad luck, and there may also be some connexion between such displeasure and *mahava*, the force generated by complaints of living kin, which causes illness. But a careful study of Lovedu religious practices over a period of years has brought to light no single instance in which ancestors have complained about anything not immediately concerning their own personal relations with their descendants—their right to tendance, remembrance, and propitiation; the manner of their burial; their desire to be told of major events in the lives of living kin. No ancestor has ever been known to concern himself with the theft, witchcraft, murder, or adultery of any descendant, nor do they trouble about the breaking of taboos which prevent rain and vitally affect the welfare of all. Lovedu ancestors are not upholders of custom in general; they are concerned only with those customs and taboos which affect their own welfare and that of their kin. Even royal ancestors do not concern themselves with the breaking of taboos that lead to drought. This is not a reflection of their carelessness or supineness, for they are quick to complain if, for example their graves are desecrated. On one occasion in 1938, when two men had cut firewood in the bush near the royal burial grounds at Maulwi, the *swidajani* wailed all night to indicate their displeasure. Again when Mologwane, deceased chief councillor and brother of the queen, 'held her

[1] A. W., Hoernlé, 'Religion in Native Life', in *Thinking with Africa*, edited by Milton Stauffer, 1928, p. 100. See also, W. C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, 1928, pp. 381–90.

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577 769 arms' to cause drought in 1938, it was because he had for personal reasons been buried, at his own express request made before death, in the Christian cemetery instead of in the damp shade of the forest, like his forebears.

577 593 It would appear that this lack of interest on the part of the ancestral gods in the morality of their descendants is in conformity with the pattern of the relationship between living parents and their children. Parental protection and care are given not by virtue of the morality or conduct of their children; it is one of the imperatives of the kinship bond. A parent loves his wayward, bad son as much as, if not more than, his well-behaved, virtuous children. It is only a bad personal relationship between parent and child or neglect of filial duty that could cause a parent to withhold his protection.

626 Sanctions for right behaviour are, first and most important, the pressure of public opinion and of the reciprocal arrangements of the political and social structure. A man conforms to the code because of his self-esteem and the high regard he has for his reputation for fairness and moderation, wisdom and ability to get on with others, generosity and helpfulness, not merely among his kin but in the wider circle of his friends and neighbours. The next important group of sanctions are the pain and misfortune that may follow if those he has injured use vengeance magic or resort to witchcraft and sorcery against him. Certain types of conduct carry their own automatic ritual sanctions which form a third group of deterrents, even though there is little pressure of public opinion against the conduct and no necessary or immediate consequence to the person himself, unless indeed he is repeatedly guilty. Finally, duties towards the ancestors, such as tendance and recognition, have the religious sanctions of ancestral anger in the form of illness, or misfortune. Ancestral displeasure can also be inferred as a sanction acting indefinitely and over a vague area of conduct to reinforce men's obligations to kin, generally those kin who stand to them in a relation of some authority. This inference may be made, not because ancestors ever directly cause misfortune to a descendant for breaches of correct behaviour to kin as they do in the case of neglect of themselves, but because bad luck may be attributed to failure in one's duties to kin.

626 769 [769] 577 Ancestor worship of the Lovedu plays hardly any part, then, in upholding tribal morality. Nor are people so delicately conditioned to the values of the society that they spontaneously react to conscience. Their moral code is not markedly internalized and Lovedu have no sense of 'sin'. Since there are few repressed fears the pressure of which on the mind can be removed by confession and atonement, a sense of guilt seldom moves men, and offenders very rarely repent merely at the dictates of conscience. Their sense of shame is more delicately internalized, but it drives men to make restitution only when the misdeed has been exposed or brought into relation with the system of reciprocities. Lovedu are sensitive mainly to the intangible forces of the social system, and the moral code is upheld mainly

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by the institutions and by the reciprocal duties and responsibilities between individuals and groups inherent in the social structure.

Effects of Culture Contact

This picture of the world view of the Lovedu presents living practices and conceptions, not a dead and reconstructed past. Christianity has, indeed, modified some aspects of the culture: Christians are prevented from performing their kinship obligations in the traditional manner; they have accepted European ideas of trade for profit and use institutions such as the work-party for the exploitation of their fellows; but witchcraft, which they are supposed to have rejected, is as a result of increased tensions even more rampant among Christians than pagans. Christians substitute God for the ancestors, but continue to believe that the queen makes rain, albeit by the will of God. They tend to discredit the powers of charms but not of *ewaga*, while 'heat', *makhuma*, and 'shadow' are still real forces, and the underlying conceptions of the causation of disease and misfortune still hold sway. Even these minor modifications have to be viewed in the light of the fact that Christians constitute only about 5 per cent. of the tribe and are relatively isolated.

The influence of Western culture as a whole is more insidious. The knowledge acquired by young men working in the towns and returning to the tribe holds implications as regards the nature of the universe and the destiny and purpose of man which they cannot harmonize with the traditional world view. They tend to despise what the old men cannot or will not make intelligible to them, such as the significance of the *digoma* and the *swidajani* which appear to them to be shams. This attitude and the inadequate response to it lead to lack of respect for their elders and for traditional values and institutions. But the total effect is minimized by the reassertion of the old values as the young men grow older, begin to play a part and to have a stake in the culture. Moreover, they are sensitive to insinuations that their doubts are due to the white man's insidious influences and soon repress them as unworthy and disloyal.

The younger generation tend to shirk unpleasant responsibilities. Thus Jim refused to take over the family office of keeper of the rain-medicine, fearing the risk of sterility which handling of this medicine entails. The absence of many adult men, who are away as migrant labourers, makes the organization of the great ceremonials difficult. Reconciliation and the restitutive sanction are no longer the great forces they used to be, since the closely knit system of reciprocities, everyone's dependence upon day-to-day mutualities and the imperativeness for social life of co-operation, no longer exert the irresistible pressure on the parties to carry out compromises reached in the courts. Aggrieved litigants, reluctant still to invoke European intervention, increasingly resort to magicians who have developed a whole new system of revenge magic to even up matters. The trend is to put their faith in magical retaliation rather than in the sanction of reciprocity.

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178 But the rewards of participation in reciprocal give and take and the penalties of being denied these reciprocities are still strong sanctions.

On the whole, therefore, culture contact has not yet brought about profound changes in Lovedu conceptions of the order of nature or of the relations of men to one another. The old outlook is still intact, even though some of the values supporting it cannot be maintained for much longer at an intensity sufficient to make them effective forces.